

have been the fact that the Republicans are actively sabotaging our current healthcare system.

Whether you are one of the more moderate Members on healthcare or are one of the ones who have a more broad, more sweeping proposal, it is the difference between the parties. Yet those differences almost pale compared to the differences between every Democrat on that platform and the Republicans, because the Republicans are seeking to undo healthcare, to sabotage healthcare, and to have fewer people covered. As a result of their ideas, thoughts, and lawsuits, costs are going up.

There is a huge gap between the parties on healthcare, and I am glad we are having an active debate on how to move forward to cover more people and have it cost less. While we are doing that, the Trump administration is doing the opposite. It is expanding junk insurance plans, reducing funds to help Americans locate and sign up for the right insurance, and ending cost-sharing payments that help low-income families afford care.

The congressional Republicans have tried and have, thankfully, failed to repeal the Affordable Care Act. The coup de grace, of course, is the fact that now the Trump administration—with the support of many Republican attorneys general and the complicity of just about every Member of the Senate on the Republican side—is supporting a lawsuit that would invalidate the Affordable Care Act entirely, which would kick tens of millions off of their insurance and eliminate the protections for preexisting conditions for the over 100 million Americans who have those preexisting conditions, and just about every Republican is going along with that.

The difference in the 2020 elections between the Democrats and the Republicans on healthcare will be apparent and glaring, and it will far and away subsume any differences we may have on policy.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Mark T. Pittman, of Texas, to be United States District Judge for the Northern District of Texas.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SASSE). The Senator from Colorado.

BLM HEADQUARTERS RELOCATION

Mr. GARDNER. Mr. President, several years back, at a committee hearing of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, Director Neil Kornze of the Bureau of Land Management under the Obama administration was testifying before our committee on a regulation that was coming out of the BLM that most, if not all, of the county commissioners and various organizations in Colorado were opposed to. In fact, the opposition was so uniform in Colorado and throughout the West that I couldn't understand why the BLM was going forward with that regulation.

Out of frustration, at one point during the committee hearing, I said: Director Kornze, if you were just located in the West, if you were just out west, you would understand why this rule is a bad idea.

The response at the time, several years ago, was kind of a chuckle and a laugh, and, yes, well, we should talk about that.

It planted the seeds of an idea that actually was made into reality just last week with the announcement that the headquarters of the Bureau of Land Management will be moving out west and, indeed, to Grand Junction, CO.

This announcement was made on July 16, and I commend the efforts of Secretary Bernhardt and the Department of the Interior for listening to the people of the West.

This isn't a Republican issue. This isn't a partisan issue. In fact, this idea to move the BLM headquarters out to the land that it regulates and oversees has been embraced by Democrats and Republicans across Colorado and throughout the West.

They also talked about their intention in this announcement to reorganize the Bureau of Land Management and to relocate a significant number of headquarters jobs throughout the West, not just in Grand Junction but in Lakewood, CO, in Montana, in Utah, and beyond.

I think it is important to talk about the reasons why it makes so much sense to have this particular Agency located in Colorado, in the West.

Look at this map here. The red on this map is a combination of both mineral rights and surface lands. You can see the red. Forty-seven percent of all the land out west is where 93 percent of all Federal land is located. The Federal Government owns roughly 47 percent of this land out west. It is where 93 percent of the Federal land is located. Think about that. Ninety-three percent of all Federal land, here in the red, makes up 47 percent of the land ownership in the West.

Nationwide, the Bureau of Land Management is responsible for managing

approximately 700 million acres of Federal mineral estates located underground. That is the entire country, of course, but 245 million acres are surface acres, or Federal surface lands. All but 100,000 acres of those surface acres—all but 100,000 of those acres—are west of the Mississippi River, and located predominantly in the 11 westernmost States and Alaska.

One of the frustrations I hear from local and county officials and environmental activists and farmers and ranchers is that when they deal with their BLM local field office, they seem to have a very good experience that people are working together to solve problems, and they like the conversations they have and the cooperation they are getting from the local and regional offices. But something happens when that decision-making process then moves to Washington, DC. Something happens, and all of a sudden the conversation and communication can stop. It changes. All of a sudden, the outcomes aren't what they thought they would be based on those local, productive conversations.

We have seen directives and management decisions coming more from Washington, DC, lately, instead of from the local field offices, where people know their communities best and understand the land best. So what happens is that the deep pockets and special interests in Washington often carry the day, make the convincing arguments, thousands of miles removed from where the Federal and the public land actually is.

That is why it is important to have this BLM move. It changes that. Instead of having special interests in Washington, in a community that has none of these public lands located in it, you are able to make that decision right here, in Colorado, surrounded by public lands, in a community that is defined by the public lands that they oversee.

I believe government is going to work better when it is local, when local decision makers are closest to the land that the decisions they are making affect the most. That is why this decision is so important—whether it is issues of withdrawal of locatable minerals or the reduction of grazing permits; the concept of multiple use over time; the idea that we can use this land for preservation, conservation, or that we can use it for energy development, or that we can use it for grazing. That has somehow fallen out of favor.

My friend Greg Walcher, who is a former Senate staffer for Senator Armstrong, who used to head the Colorado Department of Natural Resources, wrote an op-ed about this point, pointing out that the multiple-use mandate includes managing 18,000 grazing permits, 220 wilderness areas, 27 national monuments, 600 national conservation areas, 200,000 miles of streams, 2,000 miles of wild and scenic rivers, 6,000 miles of national scenic trails, 63,000 oil and gas wells, 25,000 mines, and 50 million acres of forests.